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PROVISIONS FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN IN 191 ILLINOIS CITIES

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Provisions for Exceptional Children in 191 Illinois Cities

Introduction. Numerous investigations have demonstrated the fact that children of the same chronological age exhibit differences of five years or more in mental age, and that even tho they may have had the same number of years of schooling, they will be found scattered through several grades in a typical school. The number of children who differ widely from "normal" or "average" is much greater than has generally been suspected.[1] For several years our attention has been directed to mentally defective children and to those who are greatly retarded in their school career. Authorities have urged that mentally defective children be removed from the regular classroom and also that children conspicuously backward in their school work, even when not feeble-minded, be instructed in special classes. This has been advocated both for the welfare of such children and for the remainder of the school. The amount of literature appearing on this subject during recent years indicates the widespread interest in these children on the lower levels of intelligence. The subject has attained considerable popularity even among laymen. On the other hand we find only a very limited number of reports and discussions pertaining to gifted children. Until very recently it appears that the schools have shown considerable indifference in regard to making special provision for these superior pupils. The theory seems to have been that gifted children take care of themselves but that mentally defective and retarded children by virtue of their backwardness create school problems which can not well be ignored.

The word "exceptional" is used in this report to designate those children, both dull and gifted, whose mental capacities differ conspicuously from the "normal" or "average." The term "gifted" is used to describe those children who exhibit exceptionally high degrees of mental ability, and in this investigation includes from 7 to 10 percent of all children of a given chronological age. The "dull" or "backward" group includes approximately 10 percent, of which not more than 1 percent may be considered mentally defective. There are pupils who can not keep pace with the normal work of the

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[1]Woodrow, Herbert. "Brightness and Dullness in Children". Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1919, p. 13.

class and yet many of them could do much of it satisfactorily if they were allowed to proceed more slowly, and if their work were restricted to the minimum essentials. Woodrow[1] has distinguished between the terms "backward" and "dull." The former is used to designate children who appear to be dull but whose dullness is only apparent or temporary. The "dull" child is one whose mental inferiority is innate and presumably permanent. This distinction, however, is not pertinent to our purpose and is not made easily except by a trained psychologist. Consequently, we shall use both of these terms to refer to children whose capacities to do the work of the school appear to be distinctly below that of the normal or average child.

Purpose and plan of this investigation. In October, 1922, a questionnaire was sent from the Bureau of Educational Research to all city superintendents in Illinois having six or more teachers in their elementary school. The purpose of this questionnaire was to collect information concerning the provisions which these schools were making for both classes of exceptional children. One hundred and ninety-one replies were received. Most of them were from relatively small school systems but the list includes such places as Galesburg, East Aurora, Danville, Rock Island, and Joliet. In tabulating the data, the questionnaires were divided into two groups on the basis of the elementary school population of the cities from which reports were received. Group I includes 134 cities having elementary school populations of less than 800; Group II includes 57 cities whose elementary school populations are over 800. The content of the questionnaire will be apparent from the tables of this report.

Kindergartens and sub-primary classes. One section of the questionnaire called for information relating to certain features of the general plan of organization of the school system which have a bearing upon the provisions made for exceptional children. The replies to the first section of the questionnaire are summarized in Table I. The frequencies are given in terms of percents. Thus the table should be read: 5 percent of the cities in Group I maintain a kindergarten; 7 percent maintain sub-primary classes, and 88 percent admit entering pupils to the first grade. In the typical Illinois school system beginning pupils enter the first grade at about six years of age. The school law grants to boards of education the power to establish kinder-

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[1]Woodrow, Herbert. "Brightness and Dullness of Children." Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1919, p. 54.

TABLE I. GENERAL PLAN OF ORGANIZATION OF 191 SCHOOL SYSTEMS IN ILLINOIS

(Frequencies given in terms of percents.)

Elementary School Enrollment	Percent	
	Group I (under 800)	Group II (over 800)
Types of organization which children enter		
Kindergarten	5	21
Sub-Primary	7	12
Primary	88	67
Plans of promotion		
Annual	84	37
Semi-annual	16	63
Irregular[1]	81	84
On trial	87	89

[1]Promotion or demotion granted in special cases other than at the end of the semester or year.

gartens for the instruction of children between the ages of four and six if, in their judgment, the public interest requires it. Table I shows that kindergartens have been established in one city in every five in Group II; and in only one city in every twenty of Group I. Judging from the comments entered upon some of the blanks the practise with regard to kindergartens is not uniform. In Lyons, children who are between six and six and one-half years of age enter the kindergarten but those who are more than six and one-half enter the first grade. Belvidere permits five-year old pupils to enter the kindergarten and those who have passed their sixth birthday to go into the first grade. In East St. Louis, a kindergarten is maintained in the summer to help beginning pupils who are entering the first grade in September. Quincy has a kindergarten in only two buildings out of thirteen. In Joliet, children enter the kindergarten in nine buildings and the first grade in the other twelve.

Seventeen cities having no kindergarten maintain sub-primary or pre-primary classes. The work of these classes appears to differ from that of the kindergartens in being more formal and more directly preparatory to the reading taught in the first grade. In East Aurora, children entering school in January are placed in a sub-primary class. Those who enter in September "with little or no experience

with school life" are assigned to a sub-primary for the first semester. In Johnson City, sub-primary classes are maintained in all buildings and children admitted at the age of six remain in them until they have mastered the primer and are ready to take up the first reader. Usually this requires about one semester.

In the case of both kindergartens and sub-primary classes one purpose is to give preliminary training to children who are judged incapable of doing the regular work of the school. However, in most cases children are selected for these classes on the basis of chronological age rather than according to some measure of their capacity to do the work of the first grade. Therefore, it is undoubtedly true that many pupils, who could do satisfactorily the work of the first grade at the time they enter school, are required to spend a semester or longer in these classes. On the other hand an important service is rendered to children who are less capable.

Plan of promotion. Annual promotion is most typical of small school systems but in those schools enrolling more than 800 children in the first eight grades slightly more than three-fifths are organized on the basis of semi-annual promotion. However, Table I shows that significant modifications of the general plan of promotion are allowed in most schools, as over 80 percent permit promotion or demotion at times other than the end of the semester or year. A slightly larger percent promote pupils on trial. Wheaton and Kewanee have annual promotion with semi-annual promotion in special cases. Auburn has "mostly annual promotion but is gradually changing to the semi-annual." Urbana is also making the change to semi-annual promotion. Glen Ellyn "demotes by the end of the second month after the opening of school or after entering the Glen Ellyn schools and promotes at any time the child is able to carry the work of the next grade." Downers Grove reports frequent re-adjustments by subjects. Rantoul, Naperville, Dixon, Lebanon, Forrest, and Charleston made re-adjustments whenever it seems best for the pupil. Plano and Streator promote and demote at any time that the teacher, principal, and superintendent advise such action. Morris makes re-adjustments upon the basis of standardized tests and daily classwork. A number of cities indicate that re-adjustments are seldom made after the first month or six weeks of the school year.

Both groups of schools follow the practise of promoting some pupils who have failed with the understanding that they may remain in the advanced grade if their work is satisfactory. Hebron

states that such trial promotions are made if the pupils pass intelligence tests showing that they are capable of doing the advanced work. Jerseyville promotes on trial if the failure is in only one or two subjects. Downers Grove conditions pupils promoted on trial for two months. Arcola makes provisional promotions with the understanding that certain work be done during the vacation. Similar practise is followed in Riverside where a six months summer school is maintained for this purpose. Rantoul reports five pupils promoted on trial last year and states that all made good. On the other hand Spring Valley is "discouraging the practise of trial promotions." It is clear from the replies to this portion of the questionnaire that most superintendents are recognizing the necessity of making the organization of their school system more flexible so as to provide for the individual differences of pupils. It is significant that more than 80 percent of the superintendents report special promotions and promotions on trial. This seems to indicate a distinct attempt on their part to give the child an educational opportunity commensurate with his ability to do the work of the school.

Special provisions for gifted children. Flexibility in the system of promotion represents only one type of provision for exceptional children, namely rate of progress through the school system. All pupils study the same curriculum and are taught in the same classes and by the same methods. The questionnaire asked superintendents to indicate their practise with reference to five plans for providing for gifted children; enriched curriculum, rapid progress sections, extra promotions, special help classes, and special rooms. Their replies are summarized in Table II, which is to be read as follows: 28 percent of the cities in Group I report an enriched curriculum for gifted children in grades I, II, and III; 33 percent, in grades IV, V, VI; and 39 percent in grades VII and VIII.

Gifted children are given extra promotion in about one-half of the cities. This occurs more frequently in those cities of Group II where semi-annual promotion prevails in 63 percent of the school systems. No information was secured in regard to the number of extra promotions which a pupil might receive, or the percent of pupils who were given extra promotions. It is worthy of note that extra promotions are given least frequently in the seventh and eighth grades. This is probably due to the belief that the subject matter of these grades is of such a nature that pupils who skip a year or a half-year will be handicapped in their future work. Less than one-fifth of the

schools report rapid progress sections. It is likely that most superintendents would agree that advancement by means of rapid progress sections is more desirable than by extra promotions. However, the latter plan calls for no changes in the organization of the school. Thus the fact that a larger percent of the schools grant extra promotions should not be interpreted to mean that the plan is considered more desirable than the rapid progress section in making provision for rapid advancement through the school system.

Nearly one-third of the schools report an enriched curriculum for gifted children. No attempt was made to ascertain the method and amount of enrichment but occasional comments on the questionnaire blanks indicated that various practises were followed. Bartonville assigns special reports in history and literature. Morris, De Pue, Gilman, Jerseyville, Athens, Freeport, Milledgeville, Sheldon, Salem, Washington, and Oglesby require extra assignments in various subjects. In all of these cases the pupil retains his membership in the grade and carries on most of his work with the regular class. Plano and Washington permit gifted pupils to study an additional subject. Henry "offers a course in violin to those in grades V to VIII who feel that they have time for it." Batavia has three parallel courses of study in English and Arithmetic in all grades.

Special help classes appear to be maintained to assist bright children who have fallen behind because of illness or some other unavoidable cause. Some pupils are assigned to such a class for a short time when they receive extra promotion in order that the gap created by the work skipped can be partially bridged over. A special room for gifted children is found in only three cities, except in the seventh and eighth grades. Altho our questionnaire contained no information on the point, it is likely that the special rooms in the seventh and eighth grades occur in junior high schools or in those schools in which the instruction has been departmentalized.

A number of superintendents stated that they preferred making provision for gifted children by means of an enriched curriculum rather than by permitting rapid advancement through extra promotions or rapid progress sections. However, Table II shows that extra promotion is the most frequent plan of providing for gifted children. It is probably true that few children gain more than one or two years before completing eighth grade. Many educators maintain that it is unwise to permit children to enter the high school before they have reached the normal age for entrance. Younger children,

TABLE II. TYPES OF PROVISIONS FOR GIFTED CHILDREN

(Frequencies are in terms of percents)

Grade	Enriched Curriculum		Rapid Progress Section		Extra Promotion		Special Help Class		Special Room	
	Group[1] I	Group[1] II	Group I	Group II	Group I	Group II	Group I	Group II	Group I	Group II
I, II, III	28	23	14	19	49	59	7	7	1	2
IV, V, VI	33	28	14	18	43	59	8	11	1	2
VII, VIII	39	30	13	21	35	46	7	11	1	12

[1]Group I—towns with elementary school population under 800.
Group II—towns with elementary school population over 800.

they claim, are frequently socially immature and have omitted some of the essential aspects of their education. It is highly desirable that this point of view be recognized in interpreting the facts presented in Table II.

Special provisions for dull and backward children. The provisions for dull and backward children listed in the questionnaire correspond closely to those for gifted children. Failure requiring the repetition of work was not mentioned as it is assumed that all schools require some pupils to repeat the work of a grade or of a subject when the pupil is considered to have failed. Table III summarizes the information which was gathered with reference to the provisions for dull and backward children. An ungraded room is maintained in several of the larger school systems. However, it seems to fulfil a variety of functions. In some schools it is a room to which subnormal children are sent in order to remove them from the regular classes. In others, it is used as a room to which pupils who are doing unsatisfactory work may be sent to receive special assistance until they are adjudged able to do the regular work of their grade. In some systems, the ungraded room is used as a place to which pupils who create teaching or disciplinary difficulties may be sent. In other school systems, however, it is a room in which the instruction, the curriculum, and the rate of progress are adapted to the mental capacities of dull and backward children.

Special help classes are maintained in several of the larger school systems. These are generally conducted by a visiting teacher or

TABLE III. SCHOOL SYSTEMS PROVIDING FOR DULL AND BACKWARD CHILDREN

(Frequencies are given in terms of percents)

Grade	Ungraded Room		Special Help Class		Slow Progress Section		Individual Assistance		Minimum Essentials	
	Group I[1]	Group II[1]	Group I	Group II	Group I	Group II	Group I	Group II	Group I	Group II
I, II, III	4	18	1	14	28	26	65	61	19	25
IV, V, VI	2	21	1	12	26	30	66	61	17	23
VII, VIII	1	14	1	11	25	39	67	60	22	30

[1]Group I—towns with elementary school population under 800.
Group II—towns with elementary school population over 800.

some one other than the regular classroom teacher. Champaign, by dividing the time of certain special teachers between different buildings so that those children not doing satisfactory work may receive additional help, has carried on this type of work for several years. As the number of pupils assigned to such a teacher is generally small an opportunity is given her to become acquainted with the pupils' particular difficulties and to apply effective remedial instruction. In some school systems the principal or assistant principal devotes a part of his time to this type of work.

Individual assistance by the regular classroom teacher at some time other than the regular class period is the most frequent method of providing for dull and backward children. Nearly two-thirds of the schools give assistance of this type. Some of the replies stated that teachers require such children either to remain after school or to return before school in the morning or afternoon in order to receive special help. Such a plan requires no change in the organization of the school and is doubtless effective in some cases. However, many dull and backward children need more than assistance. They do not have the capacity to advance at the normal rate and should be permitted more time to do the work. Occasionally they should have a modified curriculum.

Dull and backward children, when taught in the regular classes, can not be said to complete the entire curriculum. The quality of their work automatically eliminates many of the more difficult topics,

and their efforts are not concentrated upon the minimum essentials of the course. Less than one-fourth of the schools included in this investigation report that they are attempting to reduce the curriculum to the minimum essentials for the dull and backward students. It is significant that slightly fewer schools are attempting to adapt the curriculum to dull and backward students than are maintaining an enriched curriculum for gifted children. No information was secured in regard to the reason for this condition. One can only speculate as to the probable cause. It is not unlikely that superintendents and teachers find it more difficult to eliminate topics than to add them.

Provisions for mentally defective children. The vast amount of literature on this subject leads one to expect a large number of schools to be making some special provision for mentally defective children. We find, however, that in the group of schools included in this investigation only a few maintain a special room or a special school for mental defectives. In Group I, 6 percent of the schools reported a special room. In Group II, 21 percent maintain a special room and 2 percent a special school. Several superintendents expressed an interest in this type of work and also the hope that they would be able in the future to make some provision for these atypical children. Others indicated that the number of such children in their school system was so small that the organization of a special class did not appear to be justified. This is probably one reason why such provision is found in so few of these school systems.

Methods of selecting exceptional children. A prerequisite to making adequate provision for exceptional children is an efficient method of identifying them. School records and teachers' estimates have been found unreliable in many cases, particularly with gifted children who have not been given an opportunity to demonstrate their ability. It is therefore advisable to make use of intelligence tests for this purpose. The most accurate measures of the mental capacity of children can be obtained by an individual intelligence test such as the Stanford Revision of the Binet-Simon Scale. With this scale, however, it is necessary to examine each child separately and the time required makes its use almost prohibitive except for a limited number of pupils. Thus it is advisable that one or more group intelligence tests be administered to all children in the school. The following are among the best for this purpose:

Dearborn Group Test of Intelligence, Series I, Revised Edition

Grades I to III

This battery of tests consists of general examinations A and B. Both examinations are intended to be given at the same time. This group of general intelligence tests has been found to yield very satisfactory results but they are rather difficult to administer and require considerable time.

J. B. Lippincott Company, 227 S. Sixth Street, Philadelphia, $4.50

Dearborn Group Test of Intelligence, Series II, Revised Edition

Grades IV to IX

This series of general intelligence tests consists of two parts—general examination C and general examination D. They are non-verbal in character.

J. B. Lippincott Company, 227 S. Sixth Street, Philadelphia, $4.50

Detroit First Grade Intelligence Tests

World Book Company, 2126 Prairie Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, $5.80

Haggerty Intelligence Examinations

Delta I, Grades I to III

Delta II, Grades III to IX

World Book Company, 2126 Prairie Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, Delta I, $7.28; Delta II, $6.92

Illinois General Intelligence Scale

Grades III to VIII

This scale is included in the Illinois Examination.

Public School Publishing Company, Bloomington, Illinois, $2

Kingsbury Primary Group Intelligence Scale, Form A

Public School Publishing Company, Bloomington, Illinois, $2.50

National Intelligence Tests

Scale A and Scale B

Forms 1 and 2 of each scale

Grades III to VIII

Scale A and Scale B may be used separately, altho it is recommended that both be used in order to insure more reliable measures.

World Book Company, 2126 Prairie Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, $6.80

Otis Group Intelligence Scale, Primary Examination

Forms A and B

Grades I to IV

World Book Company, 2126 Prairie Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, $6.60

Otis Group Intelligence Scale, Advanced Examination

Forms A and B

Grades VII to XII

World Book Company, 2126 Prairie Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, $7.80

Pressey Primary Classification Test

Grades I and II

This is a revision of the original Pressey Primer Scale which has been widely used.

Public School Publishing Company, Bloomington, Illinois, $1.50

Pressey Intermediate Classification Test

Grades III to VI

Forms A and B

Public School Publishing Company, Bloomington, Illinois, $1.25

Pressey Senior Classification Tests

Grades VII and VIII

Forms A and B

Public School Publishing Company, Bloomington, Illinois, $1.25

Where there is disagreement between the scores obtained from two or more group intelligence tests or where the score of a single test does not correspond with the child's school record or the estimate of his teacher it is advisable, in order to determine more accurately his mental capacity, to administer an individual test. Before finally classifying a child as "gifted" or "dull and backward" one should take into account several other factors such as attitude toward the school, health, previous school experience, etc.

The neglect of exceptional children. It is clear from the facts collected in this investigation that many school systems in Illinois have recognized the problem of making special provisions for exceptional children. They have found the single curriculum unsatisfactory. Some children will not be able to do the work satisfactorily even when required to repeat the work of one or more grades. Gifted children will not find a sufficient challenge to their mental capacities. Several will be misfits in the school. Many cities are gradually working out plans of adapting the school to the individual differences of their children. However, the information gathered in this investigation shows that in most schools exceptional children are not receiving adequate educational opportunities. Eighty-two percent in Group I and 67 percent in Group II have no other plan for the bright child than extra promotion; 78 percent in Group I and 77 percent in Group II provide only individual assistance for their dull children. If we exclude these two methods, which are at best inadequate, fewer than one-third of the schools reporting indicate the use of any one plan of providing for exceptional children. The replies to the questionnaire indicate that a number of superintendents realize the importance of this problem but are doubtful as to the value of the particular methods in use. Thus the situation at present seems to show that most of the schools in Illinois recognize the fact that more adequate provision should be made for exceptional children and feel that a satisfactory solution of the problem has not yet been reached.

CIRCULARS OF THE BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, URBANA, ILLINOIS.

No. 12. Monroe, Walter S. Announcements of the Bureau of Educational Research for 1922-23.

No. 13. Monroe, Walter S. Definitions of the Terminology of Educational Measurements.

No. 14. Streitz, Ruth. Gifted Children and Provisions for Them in Our Schools.

No. 15. Monroe, Walter S. Educational Tests for Use in Elementary Schools.

No. 16. Odell, Charles W. The Effect of Attendance Upon School Achievement.

No. 17. Mohlman, Dora Keen. The Elementary School Principalship.

No. 18. Monroe, Walter S. Educational Tests for Use in High Schools.

No. 19. Streitz, Ruth. Provisions for Exceptional Children in 191 Illinois Cities.

A limited number of copies of these educational circulars are available for free distribution to superintendents and teachers in Illinois. We shall be glad to add to our mailing list for these circulars the names of any teachers or superintendents who care to receive them regularly. We shall be glad also to send additional copies of any circular to superintendents or principals for distribution among their teachers. Address all communications to the Bureau of Educational Research, University of Illinois.